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April 12, 2021

William C. Thompson, Jr.
Chairperson, Board of Trustees
Members of the Board of Trustees
Dr. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
Chancellor, The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Dear Chairperson Thompson, Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Members of the Board of Trustees:

I write on behalf of the 30,000 members of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY to urge you in the strongest terms to reject the resolution scheduled to come before a hastily called Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees today: “Authorize a Contract with McKinsey & Company to Provide Consulting Services for CUNY Reopening Readiness Plan.”

The resolution calls for the trustees to approve a no-bid contract at the cost of \$3 million with a for-profit consulting company to do the job the CUNY administration should do in partnership with the unions representing CUNY employees and the organizations representing CUNY students.

At a time when your administration has failed to give PSC-represented employees even a date for payment of our contractual raise due November 15, when approximately 2,000 adjuncts you laid off in June 2020 are still without CUNY employment, when searches for full-time employees remain frozen, the proposal to spend \$3 million on a contract with a for-profit consulting firm to do the work CUNY managers are paid handsomely to do is outrageous.

The use of a private consultant, and McKinsey in particular, will accomplish exactly the opposite of what should be the goal of CUNY’s reopening plans: ensuring that faculty, staff and students can return to campus with confidence. The New York State Interim Guidance for Higher Education during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency explicitly requires that “Plans should reflect engagement with campus stakeholders, including but not limited to . . . union, alumni, and/or community-based” organizations. Only engagement with such stakeholders will ensure that the plans are rooted in the knowledge of workplace conditions that only workers have. Your administration has repeatedly failed to comply with that requirement. The current resolution promises to bypass stakeholders even further by assigning a planning operation with literally life-and-death consequences to outside consultants with no relationship to CUNY except the profit motive and—even more important—with no accountability to the CUNY community.

The proposal to pay \$3 million to McKinsey is especially ill-considered in light of the unusual expertise within CUNY's own faculty and staff on public health, industrial hygiene and environmental safety. Few workplaces contemplating reopening have the internal resources available at CUNY: a Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy; faculty and emeritus faculty who pioneered the field of industrial hygiene and trained many of the current experts in the discipline, leading scholars and researchers on industrial hygiene, and faculty and staff who have spent years gaining expertise on the environmental safety and health needs of our unique university, with *our* students, in *our* urban setting.

In addition, the PSC has earned multiple awards for our record of training literally thousands of members over the past 21 years in workplace safety through our Health and Safety Watchdog Committee. The union's Health and Safety team, all trained by CUNY's own renowned environmental safety faculty, have been working for months to determine the safest ways to open campuses more broadly. Their local knowledge is irreplaceable. To spend millions on an outside consultant when these resources exist within the University makes no fiscal or policy sense. Further, such an expenditure completely undermines any claim the CUNY administration plans to make about not having enough money to fix even simple problems like bathroom sinks that have no running water.

Finally, the choice of McKinsey suggests a dangerous lack of judgment. The Board resolution indicates that CUNY management availed itself of an executive order implemented by Governor Cuomo waiving the usual procurement requirements for contracts directly related to the pandemic. Thus, the selection of McKinsey was made without the normal bidding process. The University community has received no details about how the \$2,974,800 price tag was reached.

McKinsey is the consulting firm Governor Cuomo hired when he wanted a report on the pandemic in New York State, which included the disputed issue of the number of nursing home deaths. McKinsey is also the firm that was finally forced to apologize for its role in boosting sales of opioids and that was recently fined nearly \$600 million for its role in that other lethal epidemic. According to a *New York Times* report on February 3, 2021, "McKinsey's extensive work with Purdue included advising it to focus on selling lucrative high-dose pills, the records show, even after the drugmaker pleaded guilty in 2007 to federal criminal charges that it had misled doctors and regulators about OxyContin's risks. The firm also told Purdue that it could 'band together' with other opioid makers to head off 'strict treatment' by the Food and Drug Administration."

In the current COVID crisis, McKinsey's revenue has soared; *ProPublica* wrote on July 15, 2020 that the pandemic had already been "a bonanza" for McKinsey, although the firm's track record on coronavirus consulting has had only mixed results.

McKinsey's standard plan for coronavirus consulting, according to the "Explanation" provided to the CUNY Board, involves five phases: assessment, planning, support, rollout, refinement and plan submission. The missing phase is negotiation or even consultation with the workforce or their representatives. Instead, we get a phase called "support." To announce

a plan for a unionized workplace that calls for “support” without any mention of negotiation reveals exactly how McKinsey plans to work.

Such a plan should be unacceptable to the Board. The PSC calls on the members of the Board of Trustees to vote down the resolution and insist that CUNY management adhere to the NYS Reopening guidance. Instead, negotiate with the PSC about reopening plans; engage all the unions that represent CUNY employees, as well as the organizations that represent CUNY students, in a serious process of developing the plans, a process that will respect the months of work that have already been completed on campuses and the contributions of the faculty and staff—and a process that will not cost three million dollars.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barbara Bowen".

Barbara Bowen
President, PSC/CUNY

